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drawing, Beethoven: Virginia Strahan

drawing, Head of Rodin: Bob Cole

drawing, woodland scene: Tas Shaughnessy

drawing: "camel": John H. Leamy III

drawing, seated figure: John H. Leamy III

The staff of the I is proud to present the annual literary magazine which contains what we feel is some of the best writing and art work of the year. We would like to thank all the students at Mount Wachusett who submitted work. Unfortunately, we could not print many outstanding pieces because of lack of space. Many thanks again to all those who contributed.

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POEM

by Laura J. Wood

Sometimes, when the night is clear
And the stars permeate
The shell of the earth
It is too quiet.
One cannot hear a sound
Except for the personal treasure
Of thought.

It is now, when the world that I know
Emerges as a vision
In a glimpse of a star.

No, I've never been to India,
And seen a child
With a belly full of air
And eyes that sink
To the hollow of her heart.

I've never heard a blast
Loud enough to shatter
The precious drum of the ear.

Is that what it will take
To cause the stars to shake
So people will look out
Of their twinkling Cadillacs
Towards the sky...?

And take the time out
To think
And feel.
And stitch together
Their past deeds and memories
In a gift
To God.
And will these gifts
Presented on the day of one's death
Ever show a gratefulness
Towards His?

ONE GREY WIZARD IN A WINDSOR ROCKING CHAIR

Janice M. Page

I hear creaks and squeaks walking slowly up from down the hall; then somebody taps on my door and opens it a crack. I want to be alone, but that don't count for much. It's old Mrs. Moran peeping in, and her tired old southern drawl sounds like she just came up from Georgia on foot with a broken down horse on her back...

"Maggie, will you all be comin' down to dinner with us?"

I look at the old woman--who is really very kind, with my blank and uncaring face by which I mean only "No."

"Well, then, want me to fetch it for you?"

Again I face her "No," and get on with rocking in my Windsor. I am not so fond of food as I am of you, Windsor, even though you are a cagey looking thing. With straight spokes and a bowback you're the sturdy door of a dungeon, I suppose, with a right and left arm hanging out on each side for me to rest my elbows on. And you got them straight broomstick legs firmly set like cement into the actual rocking parts of you. ...Multi-colored too. Too many coats of chipped paint on you...although the seat's worn down to the wood in spots. A quiet chair, though, you are. You don't make a racket like some do when they get old and rickety. I can't be having noise when I rock--NOT that I mind the children on their skateboards outside, OR my mouth when it mutters for that matter. Tends to break up the quiet a bit.

My room is lit by late noon sun. This time of day, the sun's low and level and streaming in through my curtainless window, across this bed I refuse to make, and on to the top of my chest of drawers. I see my doily has covered itself over with dust. Nothing would surprise me by now. There's my shadow, larger than me sized up on the wall. It reminds me that I'm still in a body named Maggie, and that I can leave Maggie behind anytime...but not now. Right now I want to stare at the plain grey walls in my room, or if not, the walls in my mind then.

I might rock back and forth as I stare at the wall. I ought to take a nap, I suppose. I could use some sleep. And I would, too, but the door was left open a twitch...

...It was years ago. I told that man it wasn't my fault I was like I was, but he seemed to be of the general voice that it was. I'll always be taking exception to that. We never had much of a marriage, him and me. And yes, I may have withdrew for a year or two because of it, but I know very well I was fine in my mind--saved by my special condition. Yet I found out who HE was himself....I just rose up out of myself one night, had my back to the ceiling, and gazed down curious at me and that man. He was sleeping, alright, just like a body with hardly no soul. And he wasn't exactly peaceful either, no more than he

was with me. That man was short on reasoning powers. Much as I tried to explain myself, it didn't make no difference what I said or what I thought. He just made up his mind one day, said there was no changing it, said it was high time I was put away for a while. I went along for the ride I suppose....

But I swore I'd take that Windsor with me, fought like hell for it too. "No way, no way are you taking that Windsor--." He wasn't about to give up one of the only two chairs we had in the parlor. That'd be aside from the divan, of course. But mother Rose--his mother, she thought I should have it, so she took the matter up with him. Seemed to me it was up to her to decide who should have the Windsor. She'd been the one coming out of the kitchen time and again to give it a fresh coat of left over paint. All he ever did was knock that Windsor around just to prove to me his size. Since she never asked for nothing from him, and since mother Rose was normally meek as a lamb, her beseeching on my behalf had some influence over his final decision. "Oh all right dammit--she'll have her Windor if it'd please you to get off my back!"

I don't know how mother Rose managed. I was young then, and I wasn't about to wait my whole life for a favor from him. I remember thinking that, too, at the time. I'll never forget that she spent her one favor from him on me, and I suppose I'd feel guilty about it, or suspicious she was buying her ticket to heaven off me, if I hadn't known without a doubt that her aim toward me was true.

That Windsor was then my Windsor, and that man--who used to show up now and then and that's all, he tied it on top of his two-tone black and white Chevy. I had a bag packed with pajamas, and it sat in the back seat with me. Rose came special out of the kitchen just to wave goodbye. She was the type to mostly stay put. My baby was sleeping inside. Rose's wide brown eyes went helpless as the Crane's pup next door when it didn't know what to do. And that dress she was in the habit of wearing was brown, too, as if part of the ground. I never did plant grass.

The house with the weatherbeaten clapboards and the crooked shutters he never did fix, all disappeared kind of quick. And my boy! He was sleeping inside. All this, altogether, all at once had caused my eyes to flood, and I couldn't remember the last time that ever happened. He said I'd be coming back soon. I sat still in the back seat of his two timing Chevy. And I watched the road rush up and whiz by....

I put my Windsor down by the hospital bed, then near the window, then in the two far corners, and settled on the middle of the room. "Here we are--," I heard somebody say. And no, it wasn't my Windsor. It was meatloaf, and spuds, and peas from a can, on a tray with sections to hold them apart--it all was the color of everything sickening--and, it was a nurse who was doing the talking. "Maggie?" She was checking a piece of paper to

make sure she had my name right. She wore her hair in such a way that made me wonder if it was supposed to be like that. That'd be tied in a knot. I motioned that she had it right. "I brought dinner in for you tonight since this is your first night here." She set the tray down on its legs in my lap. "However, I'm sure you'll want to join the others in the cafeteria from now on." Then she left, quick like she came.

The food tasted suspicious so the wall ate it for me. I was afraid at first they'd try to poison me. "Paranoia." Who called me that anyway? I'm trying to remember...I think Simpson was the nurse who gave me that name, and she started watching me eat I swear to make me nervous. "Nothing to worry about," she'd say. She'd light a cigarette right in my room, then stare me down because she'd say she would not abide my manners as if I was no more than a tot. Easy for her to say "nothing to worry about." She was the one had the white stockings on, and me, I was feeling so wretched. "Now Maggie, you're just being foolish. Eat it. Stop all this nonsense and eat it. It's good for you. You need your strength..." I'd eat when I was good and ready or finally hungry--I forget now, whichever came first. Then she'd give me a tiny aspirin in a small paper cup to keep my head from splittin' in two.

It seemed everyone twitched there, though some didn't; some wore them terrible dull faces instead. The recreation Room was enough to make me cry if I very readily had to. For the most part I would ignore them. I'd sew on a broken down machine that didn't work right. No needle for one thing. Or, I'd flip through the pictures in LIFE magazine, but I never ventured to figure what they were about. Rapid word-print went hard on my eyes. And there was a puzzle which I'll say now had me crazy by the time I was done. That place had me crazy. Changed me somehow. No. It wasn't the place, so much as being inside of that place. I'd get weak at the thought and faint. Or, I'd get queasy and upchuck. Upset; well things'd get broken. I was just plain bored for one thing. They must've mistook me for stupid.

First time Dr. Henshaw observed me, to ask me how I was feeling, his face was solid as some boulder he'd just dug up. I took my time about answering, since I had to first study that face, and wait for it to change even a little. It didn't though. I finally figured it was his way. I asked him plain: "How was I supposed to feel?" He answered, "All right," with another question--same as his first--only this time with a few words switched. I had nothing to say for myself so I said "nothing." He then wanted to talk about that in a hurry, so I said: "let's don't and say we did," which was one of "that man's" sayings from before we were married except in reverse. It just goes to show me once again how well I could reason things out, and how there was no reason for my being there at all. But to have reasoned with some boulder shows no smarts at all I suppose....You, Windsor, you figure it.

I figured it was for no special reason that Rita should fill

up an empty room down the hall, and yet, after it being nobody who came to visit me on Saundays...for years, well, I could've kissed Rita the day she moved in. I could have cursed her for leaving too, at times, afterwards. She was my first real friend in a way.

I was always saying, "Rita, you are looking just like Vermont Maid today." She did, too, as I remember her, she did. Rita, though, she never put syrup on her pancakes. I don't think she knew who I meant. We talked at each other, sometimes, instead of to each other, since I couldn't always count on Rita talking plain sense the way I could. Her mind would take off on them toots. So I'd drag my Windsor down to the REC ROOM and pull up the Boston Rocker for Rita, and we'd sway to and fro. We looked just like that "Willows" tree picture up on the wall set to motion. Why yes, I know---the Boston and the picture too had been donated by the J. M. Finnigan family. The brass plates under the seat and along side the frame had said so. And when Rita's mind was working right, we'd make up all sorts of stories about the J. M. Finnigan family. Actually...no. She did. She'd make up the whole story and direct me on what was to happen, and then, Rita being so feminine and all, she'd be Mrs. Finnigan, and she'd have me Mr. Finnigan, and our babies would be lost or stolen, and our sons would go off to war, and their wives would get drunk when they died, and she'd say she was basing the whole show on that "One Life To Give" she watched on TV.

TV? Who brought that crazy contraption in anyway? It caused one hell of a fight in the Rec Room. Rita had her mind set to watch that show. Eben hated that show so he was fit to be tied--an old man, too, acting like that. And there was Gilda in on it--the youngest of all, I admit. Still though, much too old for cartoons I should think. She thought one might be on. Me? I didn't care. But then, somebody switched the station in the middle of one of them ads, and I cursed the rude little--. I've since forgiven myself for that. Thing was, one wasn't on.

Somehow, right smack dab in the middle of our tumble, Nurse Jones appeared out of nowhere. Hocus Pocus, I bet. She hated me and Rita enough to begin with. She was younger than us by far. Little whimp with a whip, she was. She started hollering as if she didn't know exactly for who. White uniforms came crawling out of the flat green walls and woodwork to haul us all off to our rooms. Well, I went back after my Windsor. I told Jones to jump in the lake. Then, I sat rocking and sulking like the babe in the Ivory Snow commercial who got the rough end of the deal and I laugh to think of it now....

One night though, very late, me and Rita, sitting side by side, in the Rec Room, in our rocking chairs, in silence, well, we must have withered...or at least she did. She was sound asleep with her head back, in her Boston--by then it was hers. Her honey brown hair was wavy, and her hands were resting like the rest of her. I upped and left Maggie behind, staring into nothingness (since both eyes were shut.) Maggie was in her rosy pink

pajamas, the ones with lace around a Peter Pan collar. And as I stood there, it was plain to see. Rita had on her flannelette baby blues--nothing unusual in that--only it struck me strange how the buttons were all done up to her throat.

"Maggie, wake up. Rita is dead. She died some time last night or early this morning. She--." I am not void of emotion, so I screamed into my PJ covered knees when I woke up in my Windsor and heard that. Nurse Simpson held my hands tight as I screamed--most likely to keep me from tearing each hair from my head--over not speaking up when I should have known. Simpson kept saying, "...all the crying and ranting and screaming in the world won't bring Rita back, Maggie, dear, listen...all the...." Rita went and did herself in with a bedsheet in the bathroom, and it wasn't me who found her hanging there, it was Simpson, and I thank my Holy Spirit to this day for keeping me away. If I'd seen how Rita managed her own death, I'd have gone and done the same thing out of grief.

Simpson had no better grip on herself than I had on me. My own swollen eyes went frightful at the sight of Simpson, the salt of the earth, take pills herself. As she drew up a needle for me, the walls in the Rec Room wept sweat. No, by then they were streaming with tears. Since when do walls weep while they whirl about? I was caught spinning somehow, in a tornado, maybe, of sorrow. I floated up, up, up from the middle of that sorrowful wraparound, and came out with my eyes wide open, just long enough to see Simpson hand me a licorice stick...meant to make me feel better...since I ate them all the time, although I was saying nooooooooo at that time.

Oh--, my cheeks are wet to think of it now. I won't then. Licorice sticks. My teeth were rotten and I would not brush. All that poking around made me gag. Besides, toothpaste was not to my liking like a can of hairspray was. I'd tease and tease my hair into unstraightenoutable knots, then spray it to a shining sheen. I said it was pretty; Nurse Simpson said it was not. Simpson was on her way out anyway. Remming was on her way in. Now I took a liking to her. NOT that I didn't have it for Simpson. She just over did herself. Stayed around a little too long. Never did have it in her, she.

"Lord, Maggie--," Remming said first time she saw me, and she would put it that way because she was religious or so she said. She always wore a golden chain around her bottle neck with a cross at the end of it like the one they put sweet Jesus to. I remember Bible study--a little...oh well. I think once again how I can't see making jewelry out of something so sad. But Remming didn't think things the same way as me.

"Lord, Maggie," she said, "it'll take a rake to yank the knots out of that hair...." She was to words what prayers were to beads. Once she said, "Lord, Maggie, it'll take a jackknife to fight the dirt out from under those nails. Have you been at

it again outside?" I probably was...

I used to pull up dandelions, then plant them back over again. I loved to work in the dirt. So much so, I'd be lying in my bed near the edge on my tummy at night, and my hand would reach down, down through the floors, then down somemore through the cement foundation, just so I could scratch at the deep dark earth. Good earth. Mother; nice and natural. I had a garden in the back yard of that house where I lived--once, and I used to plant and then weed. Every spring I'd hoe that sweet smellin' earth over, and I'd plant tomatoes and flowers. That's all, just tomatoes and all kinds of flowers; petunias especially. Doing dandelions was nothing compared to that garden I had, but dirt still had a way of getting in and around my nails. My fingernails and toenails both were bitten down to the moons come to think of it. But at least it put an end to my extra long limbs which had me looking like a chimpanzee strung out over the bars of its cage half the time. It was luck that I got out at all. There was a steel grid attached outside my window, and I'd stand on the sill and look out. I could see through my skin when the sun shined in. My poor skin. It had to stretch up and down and all around my tall but tiny frame, just to keep my insides intact. And at night, when the light was on in my room, I'd judge my reflection in the glass. My features were rounded and washed out, I thought, but I still had the brilliant black eyes of a wizard...

I saw the Wizard of Oz on TV in the Rec Room. But it turned out he wasn't a real wizard after all since he had to use a balloon. And he didn't show no skill in that either...which reminds me of young Dr. Brodrick, who took my old Dr. Henshaw's place. I still think I was his first one; he was really a brand new doctor. I felt sorry sometimes afterwards that I didn't give him a chance.

"What are you up to, anyway?"

"Hello...are you Maggie?"

"Yes. What are you up to, anyway?"

"Well, Maggie, do you mind if I at least sit down?"

"No. What are you--?"

"My job, Maggie, is to help you."

"Help me? You? Ha! I suppose you'll help me 'tolerate' this place." ...Course, he was surprised I should know such a word.

"Not exactly."

"Not exactly, Ha!"

"Maggie, I am here to help you so that--"

"So that what? Then what? So I can get out of this place? You mean to tell me that now, after all this time, I should just up and move out? Is that it? Simple as that I suppose."

"Maggie, stop it...perhaps," ...and he toned his voice down so I would tone down mine..."perhaps I should remind you that you can sign yourself out anytime. I'm sure Dr. Henshaw told you that before. This is a hospital, Maggie, not a prison. Nobody's--"

"Oh, please don't start on all that. Did I say it was? No. You did. And believe me, I'd go, if I had some place to go--if I had something to wear besides my Windsor."

"What are you after now, pity?"

"No, I'm not after NO pity! I'd be after my boy, is what! Although God only knows where he's at by now! I'd be hard pressed to face him like this anyway....How would I find him? What's my last name? See? By now I've forgotten."

"Truitt. Maggie Truitt."

"That was my name before I got married. What was my married name?"

"I have you down here as Maggie Truitt. That's what went down on your records."

"...Well, can you believe in that James...He didn't even so much as own up to my name. Well, I won't own up to his then.?"

"Tell me, what--"

"No. No, doctor, let's forget it, alright? I'd go, really, I would. I'd move out of here. But I don't have much in the way of clothes, I don't have money, and with no place to go..."

...I sat rocking secure in my Windsor. Then, all of a sudden, I stood up and went to my window. I knew he was beating around a bush...but I looked out my window and what did I see. One, pine, tree, after, another, blocking any view anybody might have hoped to see. Even when I was out in the yard, more pine trees kept me in. Things just went that way around there on purpose, I know. And they'd say I was peculiar; all of them nurses. My arms were folded; two little minds of their own. I went back to that doctor like so, and then I stopped to whisper in his ear, since he was so bent on toning me down.

"I'm suspicious now that you'll put me in a box for good so I won't upset this applecart of a hospital you got here. Alright, I admit to breaking plenty of things. Or maybe that's not it. Maybe you're scheming to put me out, when you know there's no place to go."

"Maggie, Maggie. I don't intend to put you in a box or out for that--."

"And, it's the same for everyone else around here, isn't it? I'm asking you, isn't it the same for everyone else?"

"No."

"Oh no? Why then, you tell me why Jasper acts like he's part of the woodwork around here, all the time talking in riddles about how he's just tolerating--just tolerating. And it's no damn wonder Gilda swears the way she does, what with them pills she takes..."

...he wasn't listening to me at all, except to make plans for what to say next. And, his neat sandy colored haircut, his touchy fingertips he held onto his knees with, and mostly, his boring blue eyes, were all wondering when I'd be done talking. So I stood there. I was looking around, thinking on Jasper supposedly tolerating, with hardly no hair on his head from rubbing it.

"Have you seen Jasper yet to talk to?"

"No, I haven't had the occasion. Maggie--."

"Hardly no hair on his head from rubbing the 'why' out of it."

"Maggie, let's get back to Maggie, OK? Nobody expects you to tolerate this place, so you see, I understand what you're saying. We would be only too happy, however, if you would show some consideration for others."

"WHAT! When do I get to consider me?"

"Let me finish! Now please, all I'm saying is that if you'd begin to show some kindness and consideration toward others--people, you know Maggie? Like nurses, and things--theirs as well as your own--besides your Windsor, of course--if you could do this you might gain some peace of mind in the process, which in your case would benefit you enormously. Then we could take it from there."

"Oh is that so? To where are you taking me now? It just so happens it don't work like that."

"Explain 'IT' to me then."

"I can't. I can't. I can't! I know what I know and you might think I'd know IT by now! Ohhh--pick your boney body up now and leave! And don't you dare ever come back and bother me again, YOU HEAR? Everything changes from the inside out and don't you ever forget it!"

With that, I shot down in my Windsor and started rocking swift. My hair was resisting the breeze, and my eyes were fastened furious to the floor, and my thinking was way past angry and shifting to madness. He checked his watch to see if it was time to go.

"Maggie, look. We're not making any progress this way, so indeed I will leave you be." I sensed him watching. I pinpointed the pity he felt. It was there inside him, though I knew damn well he'd deny it. He stood up and headed for the door. I remember how I was delighted.

"YOU MAKE SURE YOU COME BACK NOW, YOU HEAR ME?"

That struck him so unexpected from behind he all but died in his tracks. My own special brand of loony behavior invaded the air and then took it--which didn't leave much for him to draw breath on. It took all he had left in him to turn around and look at me again. I was standing still something miserable, but I had a grin unnaturally wide. Since I ripped all the 'know-how' out of his brain, I knew what he had on his mind. He thought I'd be ever better off dead. I now can forgive him for that.

Oh, so what. I opened a door once that was usually locked. I felt so sneaky as I slipped down the staircase and then through the door....Nothing to it.

When I first got outside, there was a nip in the air.

I was feeling free as a ghost, so Windsor, you listen up:

"The last and the longest red-orange ray
Of the sun was sent up to bring
A see-through moon still new to the sky,
One lone star on a string..."

Fancy that. I was a poet and I didn't know it. I set about running in circles, then I hid behind a bush or two. I was acting almost as reckless as a child on a skateboard could get. Imagine. Me, by then, nearly forty. I spied on a building across from my own. There also was one on each side of me, which, making four all around, put me right in the middle. Tall, raggedy pine trees hovered over them all like a shadow, but the sun had enough spark left in it to crown them all with a blaze, and still point a finger at me through a peephole a branch didn't fill. Other than that space up too high to reach and shake hands, I couldn't see beyond deep forever green. Aside from a dandelion or two, not so much as one petunia would dare to poke itself up, I thought. I was taking mental notes.

The buildings were built out of brick. Them metal grids were on some of the windows. I wondered which one was mine. A light turned on. (By then, it was getting dark quick.) A shadow went by...bent over to pick something up...then walked the other way. The light stayed on just the same. "Figures," I almost said out loud, "everyone's afraid of the dark around here." Suddenly, a door opened. I tingled all over like prickly needles, my eyes the size of walnuts, it seemed. A man in a suitcoat walked out...went around side...(an engine started)...to his car...and then he drove away. "Nothing to worry about."

I scurried across the grounds so quickly and noiselessly, I reminded myself of one of them flying squirrels I'd seen in a book back in the Rec Room. Then, I snooped around one of the buildings in the same way a private eye would have gone about it. A door opened on the first try, or, was I just inside like so? I forget now, which. The room was dimly lit by a bulb that hung at the end of a chain off in the corner. It couldn't have been more than twenty-five watts worth, if that. Four or five dingy, white, round tanks stood together in a group, and the light seeped down and around them. It reminded me of a therapy session for some reason. I was thinking that I ought to get out before--.

A door opened up and light poured in from the hallway. I was stunned for an instant. I took sight of two brown shoes, a pair of green work pants, two large hands, a matching green shirt with yellow embroidered writing just above the pocket, a serious self-righteous young face, and a crew-cut.

"How the hell did you get in here? No, on second thought, never mind that. Where are you s'pose to be?"

I motioned SHHHHHHH! as a warning that he should keep it down. He kept a suspicious eye on me instead, as if I was some temperamental cat he'd just managed into a corner. But then, his hands went awkward as rocks he was filling his pockets with, it seemed. He opened his mouth a little; I thought I was in for a speech, but then it stayed like that. If it'd been in my power, I'd've said, "You know, young man, them awkward actions and corn-ball starts will always give you away."

"HEY, COME ON NOW, where are you s'pose to be?"

Oh but how he was cute...just plain cute standing there trying to show me his gumption.

"Well, would'ja mind tellin' me who you are then?"

I tilted a little to show him I'd give it some thought.

"ALLRIGHT THEN!" He shifted onto his other foot. "What about how you got in here. These doors are s'pose to be locked."

I was speechless. He sighed, said "Great," screwed up his mouth, and looked his eyes up to heaven so's to cover for the fact that he was shook. I knew right then it was Larry. It was my boy, alright. He hadn't changed a bit. He'd do just that in his crib every time I'd turn around. Here he was now, talking to heaven, and acting like no one could hear.

"Ya know, I had a feelin' something like this was bound to happen when the boss sent me out on this job. Nobody wanted to take it, somebody had to do it, everyone HAD to get home, boss-man himself was too bogged down by his own damned paperwork, and of course, ME, bein' low man on the totem pole--ain't that what gets me out here on this 'emergency' mind you call, or stuck here with I don't know what--and wanting, really wanting to shoot them all dead for it. So come off it lady! Let's---"

Without further notice, I was on him. Still don't know why or what came over me, but there I was in a dash, facing him over with bountiful kisses. All of a sudden blinding lights flashed on, and in all the confusion somebody said: "What's goin' on in here?" My boy cried out, "Get it away from me," then, "Man--what are you talkin' about?" All the while I was pleading, "I love you, I love you, I love you!" And then, and only then, did something pinch me in my arm, and force me away against my will. I slumped into my grey way of being for a time, then the next thing I knew I was back in my room, or in my bed instead, with a sheet pulled up over my face. "Wait a blessed minute," I heard somebody say. It was Remming. She took the sheet down and tucked me in while saying, "You see? She IS coming to. Saints be praised... check her pulse and BP." "Right," another somebody said. I opened my eyes because something was squeezing my arm...that wrap thing. Finally, I figured what happened. Remming had taken me out of my WINDSOR and put me in bed. She said, "Why Maggie, we thought you were dead."

DEAD, AND WHY NOT, I thought the whole next day...

"Maggie, what in heaven's name are you doing now?"

"I'm sharpening this here spoon against brick since you can't get so much as a table knife in this place."

"Why?"

"So I can kill myself."

"No Maggie, God forbids it. You don't want to kill yourself. Let's have it. PATIENTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO HAVE KNIVES OR SCISSORS OR ANY OTHER SHARP IMPLEMENTS IN THEIR POSSESSION. Can't you read the sign? Hand over the knife or spoon or whatever--NOW."

...What a wit that woman had. It's funny how she struck me funny when I wanted to die in the worst way. I must have hit my "extremes" as Mother Rose used to say. But I still don't think my "change o life" had anything to do with it. If anything, that calmed me down. My feelings changed around somehow; I worked things out of me. I didn't want to die. Changed my mind about that too. Rita, she'd say it was a woman's right, changing minds and all, and I'd say, "That's alright Rita, just so long as you don't exchange yours for mine."

I sat in my Windsor most all of the time then. Still do-- isn't that true Windsor? Course, I'd still go down to the Rec Room sometimes. I saw the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show; heard all the girls screaming too. But I wouldn't care to see my boy with his hair like that though. I know he kept his crewcut.

I gave Remming back her tube of bright red lipstick.

"What's this?"

"What's it look like?"

"My lipstick from--? Where did you find it?"

"Your purse."

"Oh. ..Bless you, then, Maggie, for giving it back."

I thanked her for that blessing, and what's more I told her that what was mine was mine, and nobody could take it way. She said it was nothing she didn't already know. To this day I am feeling uneasy about that.

It reminds me of the time I asked Dr. Brodrick...

"What's a rest home?"

"A rest home is a place--actually, it's a home, Maggie, for you if you want. It would be something new for a change. You could help out with the cooking and housework and so on--that is if you wanted--this certainly would not be expected of you; and you could take walks once you learned your way around, possibly belong to a church group--again, it'd be up to you, and basically come and go as you please for the most part. Of course, there are certain rules you'd have to abide by; for instance, you couldn't take a walk at midnight, but if you stop and think about it, that would only be because you might wake somebody up. So you see, there are reasons for the rules. But you'd have more freedom. Much more than you have here at Rendrag State. You know, Maggie, since you've been here--or let me rephrase that, since I've known you, you've come a long way and really are quite capable of living on your own. By the same token, I feel I should also tell you that the people you'd be living with would be somewhat older than yourself. "How old are you Maggie?" He checked the record...let's see, let's see...right."

"Well?"

"Forty-eight. As I was saying, that in itself, would be an adjustment you'd have to make as you are used to people of all ages coming and going from here. So Maggie, what do you think?"

There wasn't much to think over.

"Maggie?"

Still nothing...

"O.K. Maggie, there is another possibility you might want to consider. You could move to another ward. It's not going to be any more pleasant for you than this one--then again, it won't be any worse. Probably more of the same."

"What's going on around here! Why can't I stay here?"

"Because there are changes being made. The state has found a need to set this building aside for drug addicts, and you know, your general run of people with problems, so to speak. It's all in its very early stages, but still, it is in the works. You might say we're doing some weeding out around here. Now Maggie, is that what you want? You don't want to spend the rest of your life here, do you?"

By then, there wasn't much I wanted, other than to..

"Maggie?"

..no, things don't change that quick.

"Maggie, listen."

I wouldn't. I was rocking in my Windsor, thank you.

"Maggie, look at me. I'm talking to you. Maggie. Hello! Maggie, are you still with us or what?"

"Yes."

"Good. I thought I lost you there for a minute."

"No, I mean, I'm staying. I'm not moving into any 'rest home' to grow old. This is it for me."

"Maggie, are you sure? There are many people who need this space a lot more than you do."

"I'm sure."

"You could possibly get involved in some civic activities. What I'm saying is, I think in the long run you'd be happy if you went to this home, Maggie."

"No, no. This is it for me."

"Maggie, try it."

"No."

"Maggie--"

"I said NO."

"Maggie, I think it's best."

"Well, Doctor, I don't."

"Any kind of change is--."

"William, don't you have someplace to be? Or don't you have a home to go to? There's lots of people who need you a lot more than me. I'll thank you to remember that."

"O.K. Maggie. That's what you want then. I'll see what I can do. In the meantime, sit tight." Then he winked.

...Now I wonder...what am I supposed to think about that wink? I am rocking silent again. From here I can see that the door was left open a twitch. I ought to get up and shut it. Or, kindly ask Mrs. Moran to--but no. He didn't know. He had no way of knowing about me. And even if he did, so what. I'm here at Windhaven Manor now anyway. I never told him, so he never knew. Nobody did.

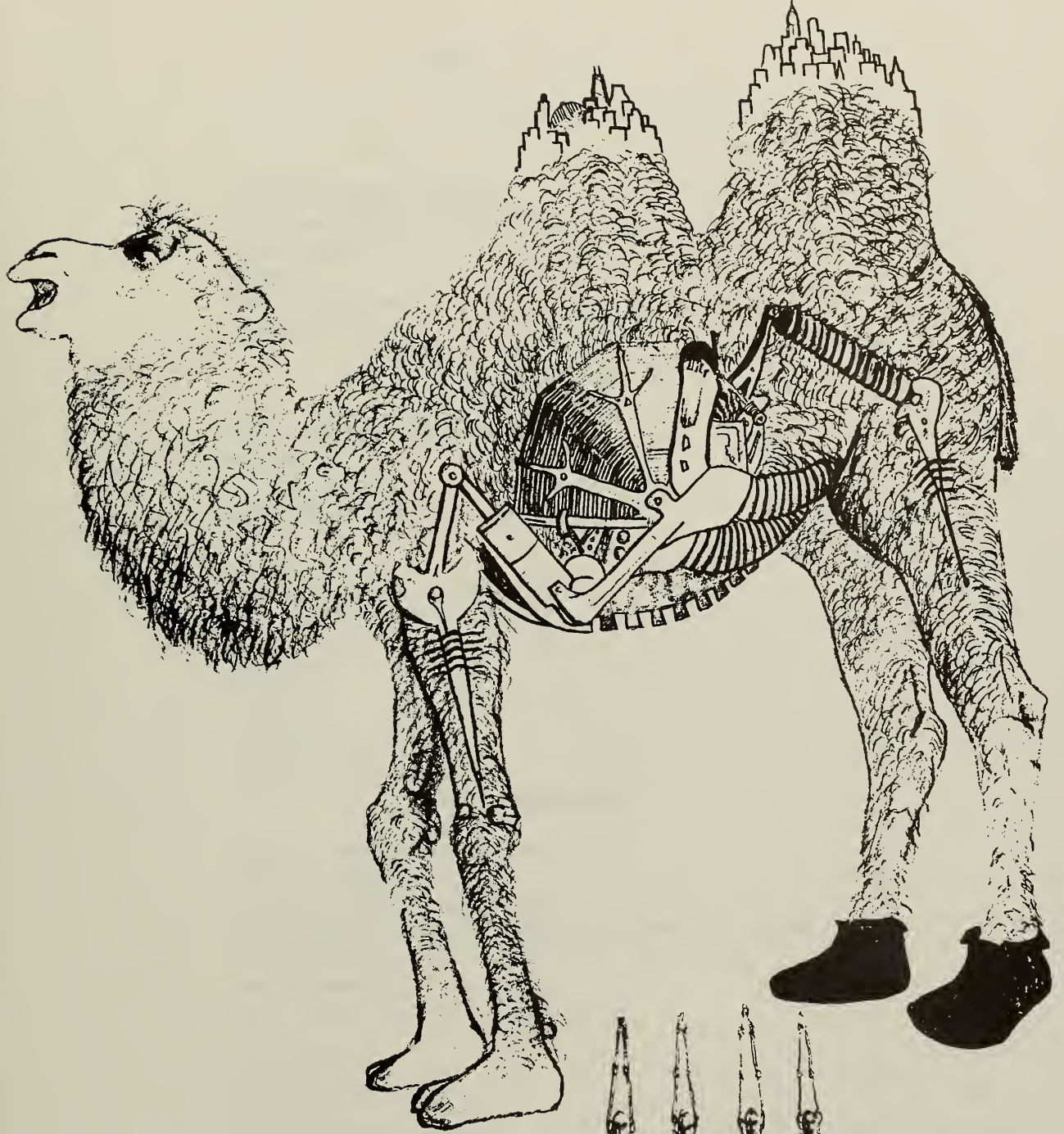
Excepting that man, of course. Made the mistake of telling him the truth of the matter. "YOU WHAT? You rose up out of yourself? Oh you did, did you. Wll look't here, Ma. We have with us some crazy wizard--." I made that mistake only once. I never told nobody twice.

I'm not crazy--NO! I am fine. I was put away and that's all! So what. In my time I have risen to heavenly heights. I have watched the whole earth go round pookingly slow, and though it looked true because it was blue, I was perfectly perched--SO THERE! Just once I'd love to see my James do THAT! Nobody can take from Maggie what IS Maggie's own--excepting that part of Maggie, of course. And when I go out, I leave my shadow and the cagey spokes of my Windsor behind, and I suppose it's by some miracle it happens at all.

--the door. The door was left open a twitch. I will get up and shut it. Time to shut the door once more, and on my mind as well....

There. I settle back in my chair. I won't complain about Windhaven Manor. It is good and happy. Course, I came with no expectations. Not even Mrs. Moran would I ask to shut the door when she peeps her way out like she does. So what if the walls in my room are grey. So is yesterday's dust on my doily. I can always sit and watch the children on their skateboards outside. I can see the sun when it shines in to wrap a rainbow round me. Or I can sit in the dark as I am and be still---

By now I am up on a string to the sky
Below I am Maggie, up here I AM I....



NOW

by Holly Grant

Angled past skies,
unblemished by cloud,
and lawns
mowed
into matted
pinstripe,
 slice
 d
 branches,
sheltering unseen fruit,
wrangle
 in a nest
of changing directions.

Beneath the apple tree,
 ants legion
and march
single
file
toward
their tunneled
sand piles,
 then disappear.

With a mangled core
in its jaw,
a coal, gray squirrel
scampers by bark, skinned and knotted,
muttering
metronomes
for "what used to be."

Suddenly
a gusting wind
rustles
with forked limbs
with rolling, geometric patterns.
And the tree
grows firm,
adding another ring
to its thinning repertoire.

POEM

by Rich Cascio

in the deep dark valleys of
rigor mortis-
a lone lost stranger stumbles
upon the beauty
of it all.

the stranger
never having seen such
stupendous
breathtaking views
in his life
as a whole
takes a long deep breath of
fresh-

clean-
crisp mountain air
and leaves his
defecation behind
on the
pretty
red and green
leaves of
poison sumac.

HIDDEN DEBRIS

by Holly Grant

Mrs. Lister had died in the hospital three weeks before. But none of us in the neighborhood knew it. My father read the small notice in the newspaper one night. Hidden in a corner of the last section, the obituary told very little about her, except that her funeral was already over and her surviving relative was a married daughter.

Although Mrs. Lister lived across the street from us when I was a child. I never knew she had any family. No one came to visit her. No one even went into her house but my father. She called him over when the stove broke or the pipes clogged in the cellar.

Grumbling under his breath, my father would disappear into the house, while I sat cross-legged at the edge of our lawn, picking at the grass as I waited for her door to open.

"What's it like inside there," I asked when he returned, really wondering what she was like.

"Oh, nothing for you to be concerned about. Dirty. And musty," he said, shaking his head in reprimand.

His words seemed too protective, quick and abrupt. But they stopped me from asking more questions.

On the outside, Mrs. Lister's house was dilapidated, making it seem cumbersome and eerie against the evening sky. The paint was graying with age and peeling from the shingles in huge chunks.

Surrounding the rectangular yard, a jungle of untamed hedges made the fortress nearly impassable. Only the front door and a small window below the eaves were visible. The ragged, yellow shade that covered the panes completed the enclosure.

There was, however, a way to watch her. My bedroom was on the top floor and overlooked her back yard. Kneeling, I placed my elbows on the window sill, my chin resting in the cradle of my upturned palms.

As time passed, the cauldron of my imagination filled with a potpourri of witch stories. Snow White. Hansel and Gretel. Cackling and strange potions.

The kids in the neighborhood said that Mrs. Lister caught our kittens and drowned them in her well. I could hear the meows as they sank lower and lower into the abyss of my make-believe whirlpool.

The sight of Mrs. Lister moving in her yard shook me back to reality. In her arms she carried a wicker basket that held a few pieces of clothing, which were as frayed and dingy as the ones she wore. Her plain dress hung loosely from the shoulders, secured around her waist with a simple piece of cord.

Like a weathered stick, her frame was thin and bony. Her shoulders were hunched forward, partly I thought, from the awkwardness of her burden and partly from the number of years she carried. I was touched momentarily by this woman's frailty and blinked the moisture from my eyes.

As if to acknowledge my thoughts, she turned around slightly. Her skin was coarse and shriveled against the high cheek bones, giving her face the appearance of jaundice. Her hair was a nest of uncombed frizz.

Tilted to one side, a straw farmer's hat sat in disarray. Beneath the wide brim that dipped over her forehead, her eyes were sunken and barely visible. A tarnished chain hung from her pocket, and she wore a pair of stained gloves and workboots that laced up the calves of her legs, where they were met by the ragged hem of her skirt.

Stepping nearer the garden that she replanted each year, Mrs. Lister stooped over the tiny plot and tenderly dug at the soil with her fingertips. Any piece of fallen debris was brushed away from the thriving stalks.

As I watched her walk among the vegetables, several birds flew past and landed on the damp ground. Without saying a word, she picked up her trowel and threw it as them, waving her arms like a scarecrow suddenly come to life.

Then, folding her hands on her hips, she stood still and waited for new intruders. When none came, she bent down and chose a crop of ripe tomatoes. Placing them in her clothes basket, she left the garden in solitude.

A group of us kids passed Mrs. Lister's house on the way to school each day. Since I was usually quiet in the morning, they seldom pressed me for conversation but chatted unnoticingly with one another.

And I was grateful. Wary of their reaction, I did not want to tell them how curious I was about this woman. Instead, I silently maneuvered my way to the middle of the road, where I could be closer to her house.

"She's not so bad as they make out," I said to myself. I was remembering when my brother accidentally broke one of her window panes with a baseball.

"Oh. Oh, G--God," he said, stuttering in fear. "What'll I do now? I can't. Can't go over there."

After supper that night, I asked him in a whisper so no one else would hear, "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, it's all set," he said, pressing his lips together. "Dad made me go over and apologize. I gotta pay for the glass out o' my allowance."

"You know what," he said, his brow wrinkling in a question mark. "She let me have the ball back."

The whirr of the approaching school bus caught my attention. Climbing the steps, I took a seat next to the window. As we pulled away, I noticed the row of silver mailboxes that were painted with the names of the people who lived in our neighborhood. The largest one had no letters at all. It was Mrs. Lister's.

After school, it was my job to stop and pick up the mail on the way home. Opening the box, I became absorbed in sorting through the envelopes, hoping to find one addressed to me.

I was unaware of the approaching figure at first. But the rhythm of shuffling feet grew louder and louder, until I automatically looked in their direction.

Mrs. Lister was standing beside me. My eyes widening, I became transfixed by the unexpected vision.

She was nearly colorless, dressed in gray from her thick stockings to the neck of her shift. Even the moth-eaten collar looked like ashes against the chalkiness of her skin. Draped over the sides of her torn, dress pocket, a tarnished chain led to a small watch that ticked in muffled time. The simple quaintness of its design reminded me of the watch my grandmother used to wear.

As we stood there, Mrs. Lister's head stayed bent forward, as though she were a statue molded from clay. I swallowed too much. Now that I had the chance, what would I say to her? Nothing I thought of in this fleeting eternity made any sense. All the lines I had rehearsed so carefully seemed corny and useless.

But the way she wrapped her fingers, bent with arthritis, around the flier that she had found in her box had a calming effect on me. She seemed so fragile--like French porcelain.

"Mrs. Lister," I said gently. "Thank you for being so thoughtful to my brother."

Raising her head, she looked into my eyes for a moment, then gave a whisper of a smile. Against the rough skin, her lips were smooth and supple, her eyes a deep, chestnut brown. Hatless, the wispieness of her hair fell over her forehead, framing the tiny features for my memory.

We did not talk to one another after that day. Somehow our paths did not cross again. Each of us went back to our own worlds, she to her garden and me--well, I gave up my window sill.

When Mrs. Lister died, her house went up for sale. My father was called to help with the repair work, and this time he asked if I would like to go with him.

Once inside the old house, I climbed the spiral staircase that led to Mrs. Lister's bedroom behind the yellowing window shade. Her belongings were already gone, taken to the dump for the most part.

Sitting on the edge of her bed, I remembered the expression on her face that day so long ago. As I looked around the room, the only other piece of furniture was a large, mahogany bureau that rested against an adjacent wall. I rubbed my hand across the layers of dust, exposing the intricate patterns of the richly grained wood.

Wondering what the bureau had contained, I opened the top drawer. There, alone in a corner, was a familiar miniature watch with its silver chain still attached. Picking it up, I held the piece in my hand for a moment, then placed it carefully in my pocket.



Gramps let people sing
Gramps let people dance
Gramps made people smile
He played his homemade fiddle.

In springtime, when the sun was warm
We'd find the greenest pasture
He would play, I would dance,
Until Ma would ring the dinnerbell.

On rainy days I would sit
In a rocking chair too big
I would listen to that fiddle sing
My tiny heart would grow.

Gramps would serenade me
To sleep most every night
It was nicer than a bedtime story
'Cause I could dream my own.

Gramps died on Tuesday
Now I am nineteen
What I want most in life
Is to let people sing, dance, and smile.

The rocking chair is in my room
It fits quite comfortably now
On rainy days I rock awhile
I listen to Gramps play.

Teresa Nagle

ODE OF THE TROUBADOUR
by Gary Amadon

I've played a few real pretty songs,
And I've rattled off some rhyme,
But without the help of all my friends,
I'd never have made the time.

You see,

You've been the very backbone,
That attaches to my brain,
And with each pump of "lub-dub" love,
Memory echoes one last strain.
And when I say, "I thank you," with my heart,

I mean it,

That's from the tips of all my fingers,
To that flutter in my voice,
Where all my spirit lingers,
And "flirts" a happy noise.
Confusion waylaid all my thoughts,
And you've helped me realize,
And I showed,

Me anyway,

That I'm a human being too,
And not some "Princeless Toad"...
"A Princeless Toad?"
I laugh to think,
That **that** is all there is...
In life,
One silly situation
Had finally lost its fizz.

"Aw, he's just bitter,"
I heard a voice within...
"You're damned right I'm bitter,"
I squawked,
And broke into a grin...

'cause I've set my goals in front of me,
And with each day from here,
The past is but a mirror,
To place in front of fear.

Yeah, I've seen the messes I've created,
And so easily I fell,
Ah the strangeness there to let yourself
Be dragged through living hell.
The trouble was,
I was at the reins,
And slapping my own ass.
I didn't think I had the power,
To let the good surpass.

That's where you came in...
With the help of God,
I'm sure that's what it was,
Because my spirit's hovering higher,
And with that thought,
I pause...

The note dear maestro,
And a clear one if you please.
I feel that Troubadour in me,
Is swelling like a breeze.

If I can picture in my head,
Soft starlight, and blue moons,
Shinin' 'round me,
As I fade off in sleep...
The rustle of the boughs above,
The soft smell of spruces,
I lie upon the cold damp ground,
oh, oh-h-h...

I stared into eternity,
Once again.

I let my dreams carry me,
With my friend...
But as I turn my back to you,
I wonder,
If it's right to do at all.
I hear the words you speak to me,
I can feel you deep within my soul...

Where did you come from....?
Where is this journey taking me now...?

I don't know what this is,
I'm not really sure at all...

But it feels real fine to know you.
If this is but a dream,
I share with you now,
I hope you feel it too.
It's
piercing like a pin right through
your heart,
Right through
my heart...
I can feel it now...
It almost feels too real...
And I open up my mind to you,
Maybe it's you...
Oh, oh-h-h-h.....

As the Troubadour is playing out his dream,
The majestic and bewitching panorama,
He,
not alone,
has created,
Is cunningly and discourteously intruded upon,
And he is carted off towards a new and
totally foreign destination...
He is delivered to a monastery,
Where there lies hope of fresh tales
Divulging testimony to a world
Outside their realm...
Abbott Peter orders the Troubadour
Be brought forth before his court...

"My brothers, present this Troubadour to our court and pray bid him welcome, that he may delight in our hospitable presence. Brother Jonathan," clapping his hands to quicken the pace," quickly, go to the cellars, fetch the eldest pair of flagons, carry them hither, and do take care not to disturb their contents. Brother David...our brother here should be clothed in a robe, would that he be one of us in the course of his stay within the confines of our humble hospice." The servant hesitating, watching for a motion of dismissal, Abbott Peter claps his hands again. "Make haste Brother, do not tarry."

"My dear sir," laying his arm about the Troubadour's shoulders, and upon contact grasping tightly with his hand, "you are a welcome sight within these walls. Here one may find much in the way of safety, comfort, and nourishment. Months have passed since last a welcome visitor entered our gates. Tell me," in a coaxing whisper, "what of the world beyond our sphere? And the art in the villages, has it changed at all since last we heard tell of...."

...the Troubadour's mission fulfilled after several weeks of festive ballads and tales, he is set free to journey over hillsides to villages along the path his timeless wanderings carry him....

When the starlight overcomes me,
 A white light takes my head
 And sets me back down here again.
It's like I left for just a while,
 I felt you standing there beside me,

but within,

And I wonder to myself,
 If this is my life,
 Please let me live it,

I wonder to myself,
 If this is my love,
 Let me give it,
 To you....

And nobody else,
 But you...

Sharing,
 All I am...

Wond'ring,
 If there's ever,

...Really an end...?

LISTENING

by Donna LeBlanc

Listening:

A calm, closed, complex shell

Surrounding an untouched, unseen, unbiased member
reveals nothing

no one

not even me.

Until broken,

discloses a fragile, formulated, fabricated being.

Who, woven and hidden by human hands,

is

set free.

NARRATIVE

by Sandie Wheeler

"Please, sit awhile, let's talk..." I hurried towards the old Bentwood in the darkest corner of the room, while he sank into the antique, overstuffed armchair. His eyes peered at me, as if I had committed a ghastly crime. I felt as if he was raping my mind, and burning my thoughts. My hands were freezing.

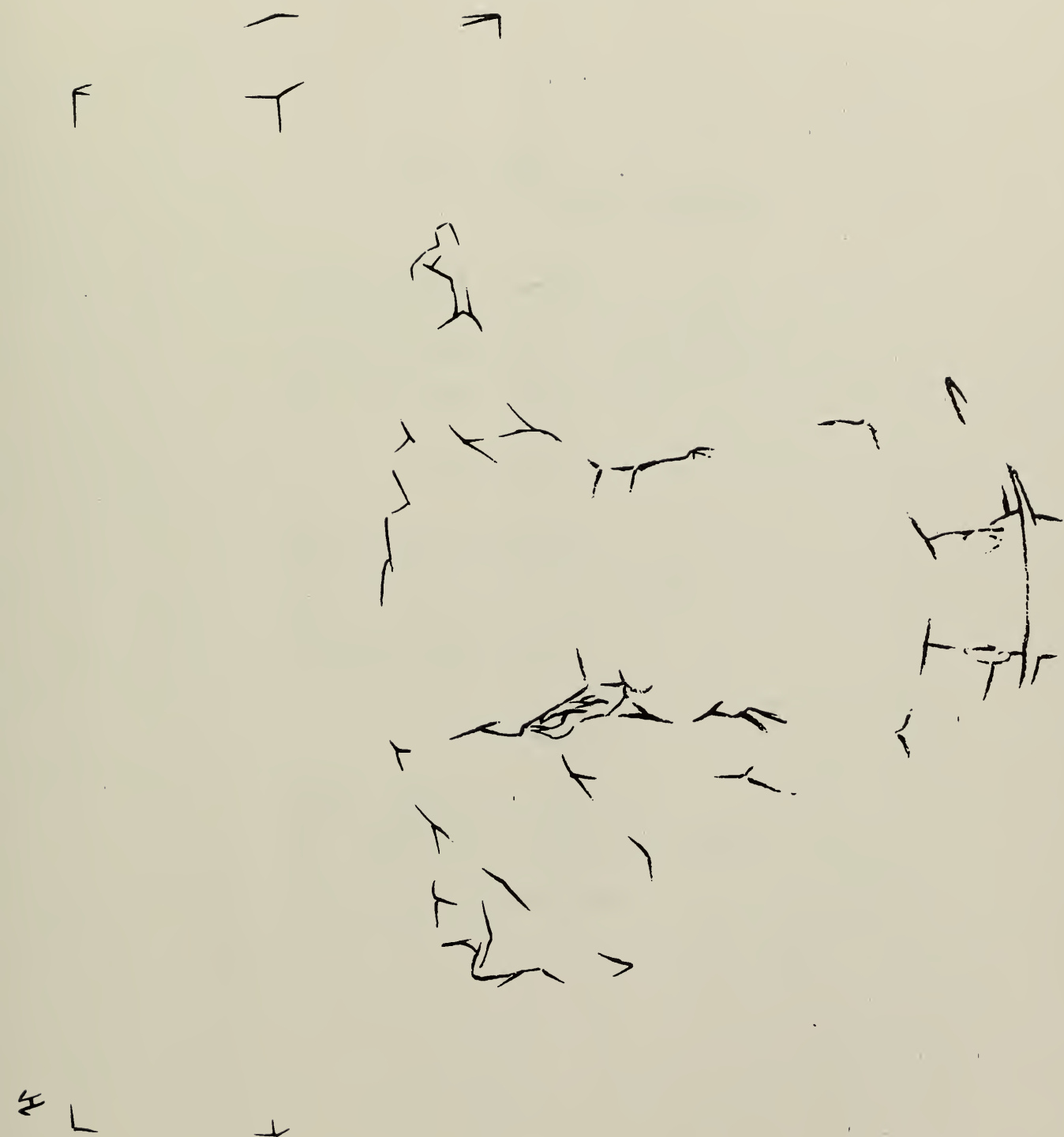
He began faintly in words I could not comprehend, perhaps the English from Shakesperian times. Watching him, I realized how hard it was for him to grasp onto reality. Where is your mind, my love? The stench of whiskey was heavy on his breath, and his nervousness seemed to fit him well as he tapped his nails on the end of the armchair. The old mangy plaid shirt he wore was shredded at the seams. His pants were blessed with colors from each of the houses he had painted last summer. He was not well kept at all. It's such a shame, too, for our mother had taught us well. The cross of sweet Jesus dangled helplessly from his neck. His eyes were cold and black, as a deranged smile widened his face, he broke into psychotic laughter.

Speaking in a deep tone now, he told of life with God, the harmony between body and soul. I thought, who are you? You should burn in hell. Beads of sweat began

pouring down his face. A face of intensity, paranoias, confusion. Suddenly, in a whisper, he warned me of the people who were "bugging the stereo." "We must be careful!" he demanded.

"What's wrong with you? You're not my brother anymore! Where is your mind?"

We both began to cry in our separate worlds.



THREE HAIKU

by Doreen Trainque

Other plants I know
have hang-ups about straightness,
but not you---that's neat!

* * * * *

The ocean's beating
Is nature's way of counting
The passing of time

* * * * *

Cool, sweet and bubbling,
The lemon-lime taste goes down
And fizzles up my nose.

ESCAPE

by Laura J. Wood

When the accident occurred
They fled,
A colony of helpless ants,
Their tunneled homes
Flooded by the waters of
Nuclear Radiation.

In the crowded shelter
The young
Enveloped their teddy bears,
Their mothers
Biting their nails
Tried to see beyond
The bloodstained, glassy
Eyes of their sons and daughters.

Michelle and three others
Staggered into the lightless abandoned closet,
And shut the steel plank
To the outside world.

The lit match
The star of Bethlehem
Inhalation of Stars and Flowers,
Giggles and groans.

Decaying and wasted minds
Not given a chance
To allow one beam of hope
To gently pierce
The innocent heart.

THE DIVE

by Peter Flaherty

"Dive! Dive!" The loudspeaker blared. Personnel were running from station to station. The officer of the deck was batting down the hatches. Ballast tanks were filling with water to take us to the briny depths. Keen eyes were warily watching for the least signs of trouble from our life-supporting and back-up systems. I who held the wheel was taking my crew down to be held in the watery grasp of the ocean. The silence was a monotonous nothingness, a cold brutal thing that was surrounding me closer than the water outside was surrounding the submarine. I watched the depth gauge anxiously while the numbers were rolling by; I realized I was heading some place few men ever tried. Beads of sweat were forming on my forehead. Conditions seemed normal, but my mind was racing. I must remember my procedures right, for we were now completely submerged.

After we reached several hundred feet below the surface, I started relaxing, then I noticed I was getting no response from the stern planes that kept the ship's death. "Jam dive," I cried. Utter chaos hit the control room. People were frantically flipping switches, opening and closing valves, back-up systems were placed in operation. Still no response came from the stern planes; we were sinking to the bottom. I patiently

pulled back on the planes knowing there was nothing more I could do. We had just passed the depth of no return. We were going to be dead men.

"You have just died," was announced over the loudspeaker. So we all rose from our seats and started walking away. We were dead men, no denial there. For now we just headed for the nearest bar for a drink. After a while we would go home to our wives and kids, knowing all the time we were dead men, and wondering what went wrong. Tomorrow was another day; we would try again. Naturally we would use the same submarine trainer until we survived. Then, and only then would they send us out to the real thing.

POEMS

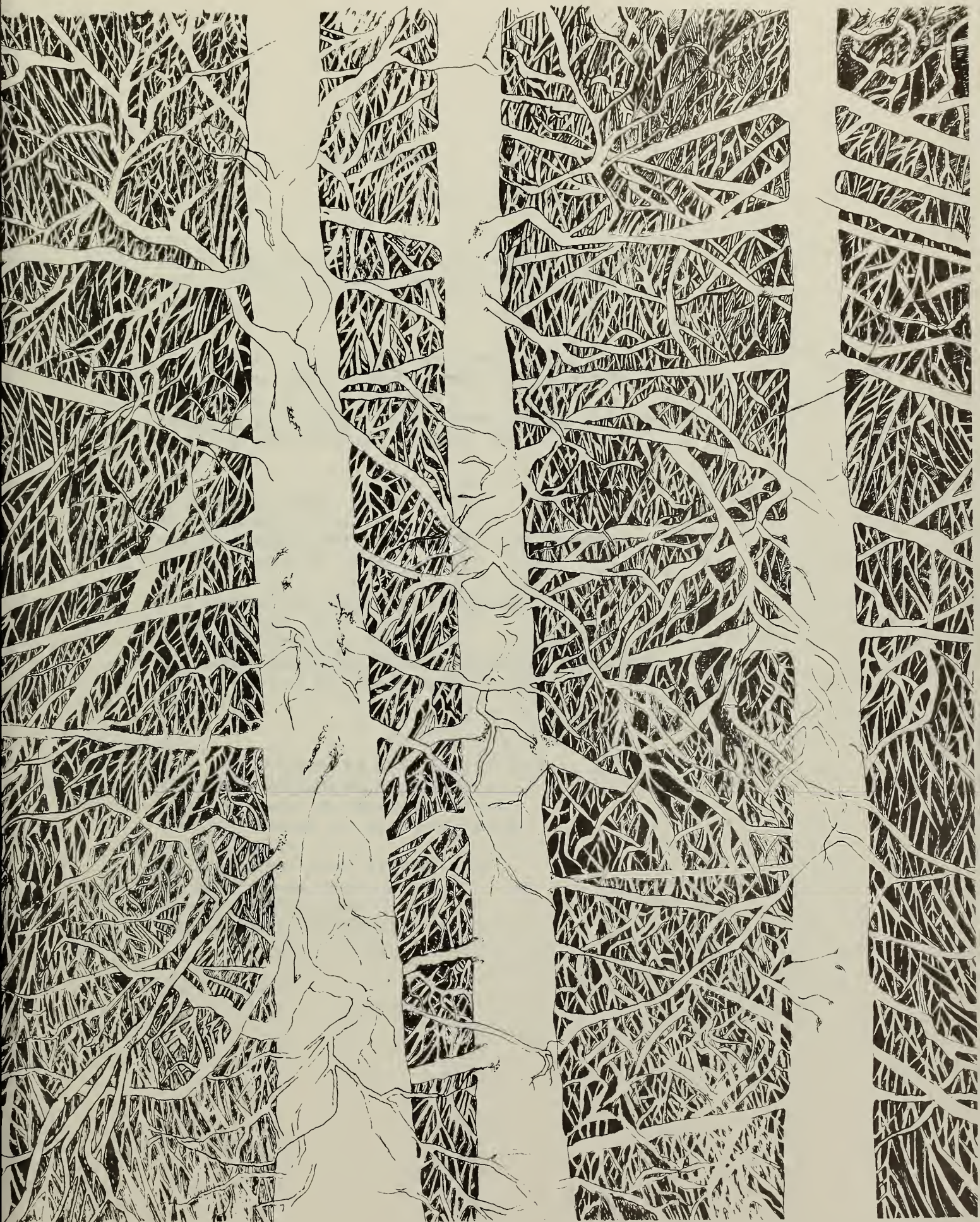
by Mark Dorval

I

My photographs sustain me;
Some have tattered, faded edges,
Others shine in vibrant colors;
All are moments
Captured in the past,
Revealing to us our changes-
We have aged as they.
Our memories bring warmth to me;
Reminiscent of a glance,
A touch, a smile,
a Kiss.
And though the borders yellowed,
Our love has lingered on;
Your beauty exists deeper than the image;
It will never fade, but
Serve to strengthen our Unity...

II.

I grapple with my Pen-
Tempting it to play,
Dance along the lines-
Diminish soft and easily;
-Scribble-
Pictures to words
Hopefully meaning something
To you, and everything
To me-
Poems must convey,
Not corrupt
Experience...



OLD WOMAN

by Nancy Ferron

Watching you sit there, old woman, alone
eyes staring, searching for something,
trying to fill the void

I was out for a ride with my family
on one of those sunny Sunday afternoons
The way you sat, so still
looking as though you'd been there for years
waiting for someone to see you

I glanced while passing by
I could not look away
my ears had been pierced by the screams
of your silent frustration

Old woman, my heart was crying
from sorrow, yes
but more from guilt
because something interrupted my thoughts
and I turned my head away from
you

Now I'm wondering how many times
that has happened to you
and you must be wondering too
if it's worse to sit and watch
us all go by
or to force your tired legs
to carry you back
to an empty house
where you can shut the door

then what?

WINTER DREAM

by J. Michael Hale

The silent rain of winter
Freezes white
And floats
Into a soundless bed of soft ice.
This floating motion
Drifts and curls and spirals
Within the breeze
That once,
I could only feel;
But now I see
In pale waves before me.
Whisper quiet,
The hush of silence
Lingers all around
And reminds me
That within this breath of nature,
I am alone.

Winter's icy fingers grip gentle
And chills the exterior of my existence;
While the silent breathing
Touches deep within my soul
And awakens memories
That had slept warm, for so long.
The fireplace speaks softly
In crackling sounds
And hushed dancing flames.
The brandy has failed to do
What the presence
Of your moving shadow upon the wall
Has done;
With feelings
Of anticipated warmth.

So I close my eyes and smile
As the shadows of your existence
Blend soft within the hollow of my soul;
And we are together.

THE BACK STEPS

by William L. Charpentier Jr.

The humid night air filtered through the loose weave of the lace curtains that hung limp and lifeless at the bedroom window. The dampness and my own sweat had already transformed the cover sheet of my bed into a serpentine monster which clutched my body, holding me captive. Its singular purpose, I'm sure, was to strangle me where I lay.

Using my toes I searched the lower right corner of the bed for Queenie, my old and very faithful, black cat. Much to my concern she was not in her usual spot. Poor old girl, I thought to myself, the summer heat has done you in. But, perhaps now she felt somewhat better than she had earlier in the evening. What I would not give for one breath of winter for the poor old thing.

The room was filled with the night sounds that drifted in from the nearby marshlands. The whirring, clicking and crackling drummed endlessly on my ears.

"Damn those frogs and crickets," I ranted beneath my breath, "Why in Hell's name can't they be amorous during the daytime, or at least make love silently during the night?" My nerves were taut. I was annoyed with myself and everything in general. I turned with an angry jerk onto my side. And from one eye I looked at the alarm clock on the nightstand. It was hard at its task, churning out seconds that seemed centuries long.

"Three-thirty," I groaned, "Tomorrow will be a long, long day." I thrust my hand out toward my tormentor and turned its face from mine. "A sleepless night is bad enough," I complained to myself, "I don't need a constant reminder of how slow time is passing."

It wasn't long before my twisting and turning started to bring forth angry grunts of protest from my sleeping wife. I was being forced into making a choice. Either I must remain still and silent, or get out of the bed. Otherwise, I would awaken Sandy from her light sleep. If I was foolish enough to do this I'd become the object of her mumbling wrath. That I didn't need.

I resigned myself to the idea that this night was lost for the purpose of sleep. Try as I may, I would not be able to force my way back into slumber. And it was for certain that I wouldn't be able to lay as still as a dead man until morning. I eased myself to the edge of the bed and with slow, deliberate movements, like a mantis stalking its prey, I rose to my feet. I groped for my cigarettes and lighter that sat upon the dresser.

With these in hand I walked toward the glimmer of the night-light that burned in the parlor. Like a thief in the night I moved without making a sound.

So far, so good, I thought to myself as I approached the doorway. In the dim light I could make out a clump of black fur on the threshold. I smiled as I looked down. Queenie, the sly old beast that she was, had exchanged the suffocating heat of my bed for the coolness of the hardwood floor. I couldn't help but smile at her wisdom. I paused at the doorway, waiting for her to spring to her feet so that she could come trotting after me into the kitchen. But she didn't move.

"Come on you lazy thing," I said in a low voice, while nudging her gently with my big toe, "If I can't sleep, you can't either." Her head raised slightly, she twitched, then lowered her head to the floor again. I gave her another teasing nudge. "It's time to get up," I said a little louder. My last encouragement produced results. Slowly she struggled to her feet, but then fell back to the floor with a dull thud. I chuckled at her obstinate behavior.

"Come on you damned old lazy beast," I said bending over to scratch the soft fur of her belly. The moment that my hand touched her body I froze in stark terror and panic numbed my senses.

"No! No!" I screamed soundlessly within my mind. Oh! God no."

Frantically I gathered her into my arms. No longer mindful, or caring as to what noises I might make, I ran to the kitchen. I placed her upon the table and with trembling fingers I reached for the switch of the table lamp. In the light, as in the dark, she remained perfectly still. My fears and suspicions were confirmed. I suppose that I knew what the real problem was from the moment that I had gathered her into my arms at the doorway to the bedroom.

From the back of a kitchen chair I took a soft towel which one of my boys had carelessly draped there earlier that night. The towel was dry to my touch and I used it to wrap her in.

With her cradled in my arms I walked to the kitchen window. My eyes scanned the sky for the telltale streaks of pale gray that betokens the coming of morning. With my foot I repositioned the rocking chair which sat nearby, to face the window. As we rocked I stroked her head and in a whisper I promised that if she would but wait, together we would watch the sun rise from the back steps.

As I rocked my mind wandered back to the day that she was adopted into the family. How violently I had protested Sandy's willingness to open our small home to a dirty, black, stray cat. My own words echoed in my ears.

"Okay," I grudgingly conceded, "You can keep it until we leave Japan. But, when we go, she stays." At these words Sandy's face brightened into a smile. For a second time I stated my position on the black stray. "When we go, she stays."

Sandy nodded her agreement to my terms, but I knew that in her mind she was fully satisfied in having won the first battle. The ultimate battle as to whether or not the cat would remain behind she would worry about when the Air Force published my rotation orders. She would have several years to formulate her strategy. The element of time was in her favor.

In the seven-hundred and some odd days that followed, the Queen slowly, but surely, weaseled her way into my affections. She was as patient as she was determined. It made little, if any, difference to her that I would shoo her away each time that she would crawl onto my lap. She would jump to the floor, and then she'd turn and face me; her yellow eyes bright and filled with excitement. She would sit on the floor before me and watch my every move. And when she was certain that I was amply distracted, back she'd come.

A thousand and one tricks she had up her furry sleeves. She took to following me about, both inside and outside the home. Like an obedient puppy tagging along behind its master. In the morning when I would shave, she would perch herself at the edge of the sink. I'd splash water onto her, she'd dance about, but she would not leave; it almost seemed that she enjoyed being tormented by me. At supper time she would take up a position behind my chair; I knew that she would be there, but I would always have to turn to make sure that she was. After several weeks of her gnawing away at my resistance, I finally admitted to myself that my wordy dislike for her was nothing more than a farce. We became inseparable friends. If she was not about my feet, nor on my lap, I would wonder where she was. And when I would be gone from the home she would perch herself on the arm of my favorite chair and wait for my return.

Eventually the time came when we were to leave Japan. Gruffly I told Sandy that the Queen would not come with us on our return to the United States and reminded her of the conversation we had had several years earlier.

"We go, she stays."

The words were hollow and were spoken with very little conviction, but I had to protect my male pride. I wouldn't allow myself to be beaten into submission. At my words Sandy grew angry and would not talk to me. As an additional consequence my two year old son cried, and the Queen avoided me like the plague. The words which my Godmother had so often spoken to me when I was a child, rang in my ears.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." True I thought, how very true.

The three of them could have spared themselves any and all grief had they known that in this matter I was my own worst enemy. I could fool them easily enough, but I couldn't fool myself. I knew in my heart that regardless of cost, the Queen would in fact in becoming to America. It was only after I had made and paid for all the necessary arrangements for the Queen's transport to the States that the home returned to normal.

I recalled how happy we all were when we picked her up at the airport in Montgomery, Alabama. She rode on my shoulder as we drove home. She stuck her cold, wet nose into my ear and a chill ran up my spine. I made some remark about her still being a bothersome pest while wiping from my eyes tears of joy and love with the back of my hand. Sandy had seen me shiver and reached over to take the Queen from my shoulder. She rubbed her face against Sandy's hand, but would not allow herself to be taken down.

So many memories of her peculiar antics and unpredictable mannerisms flooded my mind as I sat there. I had never taken the time to realize that we were both growing old. Through the years the bond between us had grown stronger with each passing day. She was mine and mine alone. I can see her now, struggling to free herself from the hands of a passing fancier, because I had leveled my finger in her direction and in mock scorn accused her of being a Jezebel.

Now as I watched through the kitchen window, the eastern sky was beginning to turn a pinkish gray. As slowly as I could I rose from the rocker and walked to the doorway that opened onto the back steps.

I stood for several minutes on the small porch looking beyond at the beauty of a new day. The lawn was fresh and green. The wee drops of water that clung to the blades of grass sparkled like little emeralds. At the edge of my garden a young groundhog sat up on his back legs. He looked in my direction, then went on about his morning meal. I had seen the little robber on other occasions. I knew that he was the one that had eaten all but a few of the small, tender cabbage plants I had set out early in the spring. And that now he was chomping on the yellow wax beans that I had intended for my table. My neighbor's son had offered to lay in wait for the little villain, and to shoot him, but I could not allow such a thing to be done. My garden was important to me, but in no way, shape, or manner was it so important that I would knowingly condemn an animal to its death for doing nothing more than what was perfectly natural for its existence.

With a heavy sigh I took note once again of the bundle I carried in my arms. I fixed the towel about the Queen's neck; how frail she now looked. I stepped on the top step, then eased myself into a sitting position.

There we sat, her in my arms, watching the morning sun raise its golden head above the distant horizon. Following an exact schedule that Mother Nature had determined at the beginning of time, the sun climbed its way into the sky. Unhurried by my concern it seemed to pause in its journey, if for only a moment, to perch itself on the top of one of the stately, green pines at the edge of the lower marshland. How much it looked like a star-topped Christmas tree.

For a goodly number of years our summer days had started in a very similar way. Me sipping my morning coffee and her lapping up, with great relish, a fresh saucer of cold milk. Somehow she always managed to finish first. Then licking away the little droplets of milk which clung to her chin whiskers, she would climb onto my leg. She would assume the posture of a living sphinx for a minute or two, then she would lower her head until her chin rested on her paws. From over my kneecap she would peer out at the world beyond. I would stroke her sleek, black body with my hand. The morning sun would catch in her fur and she would glisten like a figurine carved out of the finest black onyx.

Together we would watch the marshland come to life. From beyond the hills a mourning dove would coo its plaintive song. The sorrowful melody which it sang would ride on the gentle morning breeze to the ears of another dove in the open meadow which would echo the melodic cry. On more than one occasion a rusty throated crow would try to join in, but its brassy, uninvited cackle only destroyed the tranquility of the moment.

As for the Queen, I'm sure that she could see things that I could not. Things that would prod her primitive instincts into life. She would begin to flex her paws and crank her stubby tail. My thin summer pants offered no protection against her needle sharp claws. More than once, in our decade together, she had given me cause to wince in agony. But the pain was always short-lived and my love for her was long. I could not scold her for doing what was natural.

The excitement that boiled in her brain was reflected in her eyes that darted to and fro to follow the fluttering of a bird, or the blind charge of a frantic field mouse. Being nothing more than a mere human I could neither know, nor understand how she felt. I could sense, however, when she could no longer suppress, or deny her natural instinct for the chase. At that point I would softly say, "Well go-to-it." Even in her later years she would bound from my lap like a kitten and scurry across the lawn to the pine grove at the water's edge. There she would play her game of stalk, but never catch, with any poor, hapless creature that was foolish enough to be caught

unaware while grubbing for its morning meal. The marsh birds like the grumpy spotted frogs and irate chipmunks would chatter and grunt their daily protest against her invasion of their territory. They may just as well remained mute for all the good that it ever did. Their angry chirps and huffy arooomps fell on deaf ears. It always seemed to me that their angry complaints were an expression of aggravation more than that of mortal fear.

How filled with delight my summer mornings would become as I watched her head bobbing above the tall grass and orange blossomed jewel weed. Whoever it was that first stated that cats were the epitome of grace and elegance, surely could never have encountered such a cat as the Queen. She had all the grace and elegance of a three-year-old prima ballerina making her debut in a dance school rendition of "Swan Lake." There was very much movement and very little control. I would laugh aloud whenever she leaped skyward in pursuit of a winged grasshopper that had taken to flight to avoid her snooping nose. She'd fall to the ground with empty paws with a most ungracious thud.

Whenever she would disgrace her feline heritage by clumsiness, she would right herself, cast a glance in my direction, twitch her stubby tail as if to say, "So what," then with a show of great dignity she would leave the scene of her recent disaster.

From within the house I began to hear the typical morning sounds, the clanking of pans and dishes. Usually these sounds signaled that it was time for me to go inside and prepare myself before breakfast was upon the table. This morning was quite different; I made no effort toward going inside. My delayed arrival at the table excited my wife's curiosity. I heard her walk up to the screen door behind me.

"Jack," she called through the screen, "it's time to come in. You'd better get a move on or you'll be late for work."

I tried to answer her, but the words stuck in my throat. I turned to face her, but all that I could do was to shake my head back and forth. It was then that she noticed I had the Queen bundled up in the yellow towel. Without any further attempt to talk with me she silently eased the main door shut.

I stared toward the horizon through eyes that were clouded by tears and could no longer see. A hurting lump swelled within my throat. I felt her twitch beneath my hand, but this day she did not bound from my lap like a kitten. With what little strength that remained she turned to face me. Crying like a child I whispered softly, "Well go-to-it." I pressed her to my breast, and lowered my head to kiss goodbye my long time and constant companion. There on the back steps we sat together for one last time.

ODE TO A REFORMED THUMBSUCKER

by Peggy Bronson

This stupid old thumb;
Is really quite dumb;
It always gets in the way.

Though I often don't know it;
In my mouth I stow it;
I may bite it off some day.

It is hard, don't you see
To keep it from me;
But I think I know what to do.

It would really be neat;
To eat with my feet;
So I'll stick each thumb in a shoe.

Well that didn't work, and here I
sit, still wondering how;
To stop sucking my thumb;
(Cause it's really quite dumb);
And I am much too old for that now.

With the help of a friend;
And a paper and pen;
I shall write down each time
(and I'll nab it!)

Be it months or a week;
I shall certainly seek;
To get rid of this nasty old habit.

I kept all the score;
But I'm scoring no more;
Thank goodness, I'm totally done!

I'm happy to say;
Last October, one day;
I FINALLY stopped sucking my thumb!!!!

CLOWNS ARE HUMAN TOO

by Laura J. Wood

Clown,
With white jumpsuit,
Painted smile
Very nearsighted
Shuffles
Through the orange confetti
On the side of
The road.

For a heartbeat of time
A solitary audience
Whirrs by
Pointing
And ruthlessly laughing.

He made the mistake
Of not laughing along.

He is reminded
That it is too late
To tear down the props,
And reunite the curtains
He cannot step out
Of what he's made himself.

He is a prisoner of his memories.
Clown,
Blindly walking
On his way
To another
Parade.



THE IDEAL PET

by Patricia Thibodeau

Within recent years there has been a growing interest in exotic pets, both for their aesthetic value and for their snob value.

Due to this upsurge of interest in acquiring the unusual, many of the uncommon have become as common as the household cat. One particular species--the vampire--has received little attention until recently when it was removed from the belfrys of afficianados and brought to the attention of the more general public.

The true vampophile interested in acquiring his own vampire as a pet must travel to Wallachia, a remote section in the north-western section of Romania. Since breeders do not advertise their whereabouts, you may find it necessary to travel from one village to another until you note the signs that signify you are in the home territory of a vampire breeder.

These signs are easily detected upon your arrival at any inn. There will be garlic flowers garlanded about each doorway and window opening. You should also notice an abundance of crucifixes on the walls and around the necks of the villagers. If you feel you are in the proper area but are still unsure, merely wait until sundown for absolute verification. At this time there should be a mass influx through the entryway, doors will be slammed and bolted, and each window closed and securely locked. Locals will seat themselves about small tables, whispering, looking nervous, and clutching the crosses around their necks.

At this point, you should retire to your room, unlock your window and wait. If your future pet comes from good breeding stock he will hover outside your window, in the form of a bat, awaiting your invitation to enter, after which he will resume his natural form.

Now that you have obtained your pet and are a true vampophile, you must maintain his diet. The vampire's eating habits are not fussy and he will be quite contented with a repetitious diet of whole blood. These needs can be met adequately by purchases from the wholesale blood banks that do business with the hospitals.

In the event you should run out of his regular food, there are a few alternatives. You can bring him out hunting with you; due to his unique ability to change his form into that of a bat, he can bring down a deer or a few rabbits in short order. If you live in a city your problem is a little more complex and may necessitate the capture of your neighbor's Doberman (the one who continually nips at your heels every time you mount your own stairs). In either case, the imperative command is that you must not let your pet go without nourishment. He is

a very highly developed breed and unlike Rover, who will do no more than look forlorn if he misses a meal, the vampire will suffer greatly from lack of sustenance and may become a little nippier with you than the Doberman ever was.

His sleeping accommodations are likewise simple. He must, at all times, be kept out of the sunlight. He will have brought with him some of his native soil; because of a security problem that is inbred, this must be left in his bed or coffin.

It happens occasionally that the pet you acquired for its rarity becomes as common a pet as the alligator, the scorpion, and the cobra--thus destroying its snob value. If this is the situation and you would like to put your pet into "storage" until it can be reintroduced later as a classic, this can be accomplished with a minimum of effort.

You will need to obtain a stout piece of ash wood, with one end whittled to a sharp point and a sturdy mallet. During the daylight hours, while the vampire is sleeping, line up the pointed end of the ash directly over the heart and give it a couple of firm whacks with the mallet. There will, unfortunately, be a great spurt of blood after the penetration due to the slow digestive processes of the vampire; you may wish to surround the area with a plastic sheet which can be rolled up and disposed of later. Whenever you wish to bring him back, simply wait until nightfall and sprinkle his remains with a few drops of blood. Your pet will rapidly return to his normal form.

If you wish to keep your pet permanently dead, the process is similar, but slightly more complicated. After the staking, you must fill the coffin with garlic flowers, sprinkle it with holy water, seal the outside with solid silver spikes--pounded firmly in--and top it with a solid silver crucifix. The casket should be buried on an uninhabited island, where, if the coffin is ever opened and the safeguards removed, the vampire will be trapped since he cannot cross running water of his own volition, and will eventually die of malnutrition.

For the true connoisseur of the anomalous, the vampire makes the ideal pet. His needs are simple, he doesn't shed, and has proved himself to be an excellent companion--keeping his own company during the day, but offering warm friendship through the long evenings. He also has one unique attribute--he can be put on "lay-away."

BLACK THUMB STRIKES AGAIN

by Peggy Bronson

As you surely know;
Flowers will grow;
Out in the field or wood.

When left all alone;
They've always grown;
Exactly as they should.

In the rain or the sun;
They have lots of fun;
Tumbling all over each
other;

But when they're brought
home;
(As I've often been shown)
The story is quite another.

They'll grow anywhere;
With hardly a care;
(They do this all by themselves).

Though I love them dearly;
I can see quite clearly;
They hate life at home on
my shelves.

As they wither and die;
And I sit here and cry;
Attempting to clean up
this mess;

One tall flower;
Stands like a tower;
Have I really received
my request?

Is it truly loyal?
Does it just like my soil?
Or did it just choke off
all the rest?

Everything went so slow
And the sky was oh so blue
The day was oh so perfect
And all because of you.

The wine, the river, the song
Getting high with a friend
Soaking in all the colors
Hoping it would never end.

Driving on the back roads
Stopping to look around
Walking through the forest
Soaking up every sound.

We knew we were happy
Sang and laughed through the day
And I will always wish
Each day could be this way.

Teresa Nagle

THE BUSINESSMAN

by Robin Mackey

Upon his return from the business luncheon, Harry Lamonte passed by the secretarial pool, nodded to Jean, the transcriptionist, and retreated to his plush surroundings in the Chicago office of the LaMeyers Corporation. As he sat down in the naughahyde executive seat, paranoia struck. Had Jean looked a bit more quizzical than usual? She tends to be a bit nosy at times, but perhaps she only noticed how tired he looked; that was fact.

Nervously, Harry hoisted his trim but aging body over to the closet, opened his paneled walnut door, and peered at his reflection in the mirror hung within the structure. His hazel eyes widened as he was suddenly cognizant of the fact that he had not shaved this morning; the blackish stubs now prominent, accented by the purple half-moons under his eyes. He slammed the closet door in disgust and began to pace the maroon shag carpet, occasionally peering down at his patent leather wing-tip shoes; the laces occasionally peeking out from underneath the trousers of his Pierre Cardin suit.

Harry was the top sales executive for LaMeyers' from the time he was brought into the company in 1964 until his promotion to executive vice president exactly six months ago this past week. Quite an accomplishment for a man who previously peddled vacuum cleaners in the conventional door-to-door manner.

Harry often reminisced his pioneering days, hovering on the low rungs of the business ladder; typists and part-time high school girls in basic cashmere sweaters being his only commanders. But the most vivid memory that Harry had stored in his business mind was that of his sales manager, Fred Simpson.

Fred was the kind of guy whom every young rookie in the business aspired to be. He was a go-getter, always on the ball; jogged six miles each night before supper, and he would do everything in his power to make one feel proud of even his minor achievements at the Astro Vacuum Cleaner Company.

Harry remembered the late afternoon meetings that Fred had arranged for the two of them. He would sit back in the naughahyde executive chair, expounding on every minute detail of newest sales techniques; the acoustics of his deep "down Maine" voice resolving upward from the plush carpet while Harry sat in the Eames' chair, nervously trying to remember his advice on tricks of the trade, for Fred was an expert--no doubt about that.

Mr. Simpson (as affectionately titled by the secretarial pool) climbed into the high society business ranks from being a mere salesman, much like that of Harry. He had started at

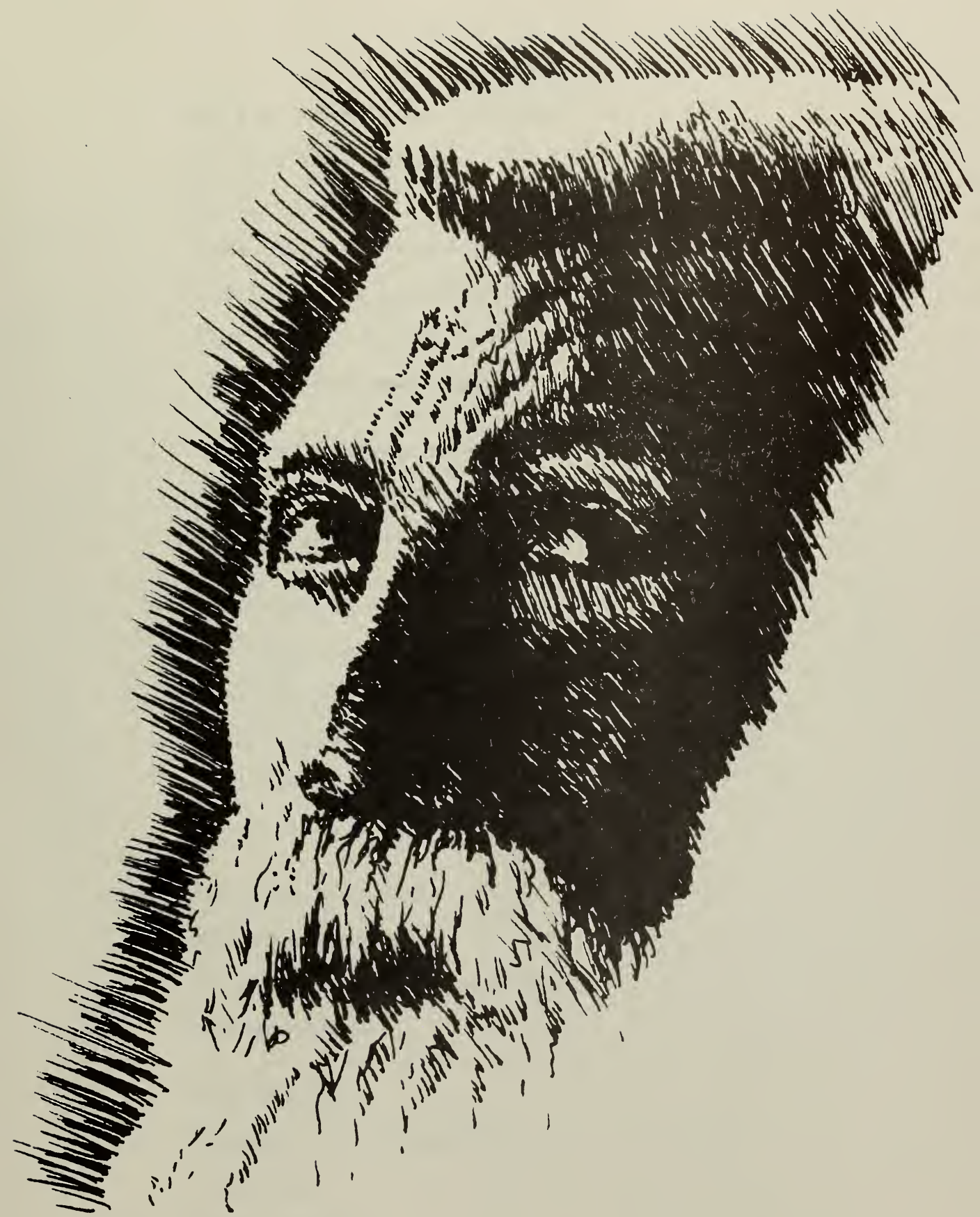
Astro some fourteen years before that as a rooked and climbed up the ladder of success by displaying revolutionary sales techniques, which boosted net sales by seventy-seven percent in just one year. Truly a success story.

Although Fred's accomplishments were admired by others attempting to obtain the American Dream, he began to go downhill as time passed on. Months after Harry had begun to grasp some of the ideas expounded upon him, Fred began to regress into the confines of his office, barely speaking to the help, often accusing them of malicious thoughts that would never have entered this minds. As he got progressively worse, Fred called Harry into his office one day and confidingly informed him that he was leaving. He did not know the whereabouts of his destination, but Harry gathered from the information given him that Fred was leaving this world of business minds and attitudes.

He never saw Fred Simpson again.

The intercom buzzed Harry's line at the Chicago office of LaMeyer's Corporation and he responded by letting it ring; the acoustics resounding from the plush carpet floor. Gradually, it ceased.

Harry Lamonte left no messages that day, put on his trench coat, walked past the secretarial pool, and was never to be seen again.



Bob Cole 80

T.C.

by Laura J. Wood

He sat in the electric chair
Of talk show guests.
Legs folded
Arms bent across his grey-brown sportscoat,
Strengthening the forcefield
That reflected the arrows of questions,
Aimed at his emotions.

"I am struggling with the alimony payments,
Right now I'm living in my car,
With my goldfish, Herman."

Laughter,
The snake that crawled up his legs
Over his arms
And finally rested
Behind the dark caverns
Of his cloudy eyes.

Shifting his weight
His eyes refused
To absorb the world around him,
The questions.

The answers,
A shrug of the shoulders,
A snicker
And a "Well,"
'What can I say?'

DESCRIPTION

by Deborah A. Salkaus

Disgust. How does one survive in a room filled with thirty or forty vibrating octopus-like greasy machines. Ever-present noise. Can't think straight. Grease and oil constantly splattering the body that works the shiny black machine as he feeds it a smidgen of metal to drill a hole through or cut an end off of. Monotonous. Metal chips flying through the air you inhale; everything you touch is slippery. Continuous grinding of drill presses, never ceasing, loud and overpowering to the eight hour inhabitants of Department Eight. The rumbling of a wooden cart on wheels filled with countless metal gadgets, being pulled by an errand boy, is heard daily. My eyes are strained on my work, but I frequently glance up at the clock. Will this day ever end? The aroma of coffee tells you it's time for a break, finally. Retreating to the john with a butt and cup of coffee is all they have to look forward to. What a pit. It probably hasn't seen a coat of paint since my older brother painted it in the summer of sixty-seven, between semesters.

What a crummy view. Millers River. So filthy, nothing could possibly survive except some overgrown slimy sucker that has adapted to the near lifeless environment over the years. You can almost see fumes rising from the river in ninety-degree weather and the stench is unbearable. I remember thinking how I wished I could be one of those healthy green trees on the river bank out in the sun, doing what I wanted on a sunny afternoon, as I peered through my window. But I had committed myself. Enormous windows with a film, perhaps of five years or more, of oil and fingerprints covered each pane to the corner perfectly, and old chewed tobacco sticks to the window like a leech, spit there by some retired individual. That damn sun reveals every imperfection.

I remember what the basement of this shop was like. Dungeon, was all I could think. How do they exist each day, year after year, in a place so dingy and dark, with no air or light? Machines even louder, closer together, dirtier and more demanding than ours. An ideal place to keep lepers.

Phooey. I broke another drill.

A TRIP

by David Wilson

A trip in the mind
Of the far out kind

A trip to the light
We lose all our fright

A trip without love
Not even a dove

A trip to a land
Where trips are not banned

A trip to the moon
Will go very soon

A trip to the sun
But never have fun

A trip is all lost
When not in the mind.

THE ROOM

by David Wilson

Dark and dusty it stands
Waiting for someone to come
and release its loneliness.

Hinted whispers of happenings
long forgotten, linger still,
within these pale green walls.

What person refuged here
on dark, wet days?
Who slumbered within these walls?

Only the hinted whispers and
shadows know.

An Unforgettable Character

by Rich Cascio

I wouldn't admit my guilt to the police. But it was obvious I was drunk. That sharp corner seemed to come out of nowhere. Before I knew it, my green '67 Ford Falcon was sliding down that country road on my driver's door. I vaguely recall the yellow dashed line next to my face as my car slid to a halt.

Which brings me here, to this damp, dreary dungeon the police call a cell. Like a common criminal, I'm thrown in here and told to "sleep it off" on the wooden bench. While they, in the next room, flip on an electronic device that spins the cell around and around until I'm forced to make them stop by vomiting severely all over the comfortable wood bench they provided me with.

The sound of echoing voices awakens me from my deep drunken sleep. Much to my new cellmate's surprise, and mine, I find myself lying under a dripping bench. From my prone position I could not make out any facial features, only that this man had a rather large 12-1/2 foot size crumpled into what looked like a pair of 10-1/2 Army issued combat boots. Already I had second thoughts about this guy. Now that my head was clearing out some fog, I seemed to recall the conversation between the two officers who brought in this strange man. I gathered he was arrested for trying to get arrested all week long.

I tried to imagine why anyone would want to be arrested unless he was some kind of psychotic killer who didn't want to kill anyone else, so he turned himself in to the authorities.

I stayed under my shelter, and watched the tall man tapping on the cell walls. He did this quite systematically. Beginning in the corner, he worked his way from left to right until he had covered every inch of one wall with light fingertaps. Then he moved to the next wall, and so on.

When he finished three walls he crouched down and faced me cross legged. His face was full of wrinkles, somewhat like roads on a map. Then his face brightened, the lines disappeared and he smile an ear-to-ear smile.

"I'm Kilgore Trout, I know why you're here, I've looked deep within your mind. You have nothing to fear; you won't be here in jail much longer."

I backed myself as far as I could under the bench; my back was almost pressed against the wall. There seemed to be a larger space under the bench than I thought there was. I felt as though I could keep inching back into the next room that backed the cell.

"Please don't go any farther back." He looked worried. I stopped moving; the sound of his voice almost frightened me motionless.

"The arresting officer forgot to read you your rights and there will be no record of your breathalyzer test on file. The police will have done a mechanical check on your car and will find your brake lines were leaking and the tie rods snapped. You'll walk out of here scott-free, wondering whether or not you want to press charges of false arrest." He scratched his greying Afro and tugged at his bush mustache.

"Now please come out from there it seems you've stumbled onto what I've been trying to find since I got myself arrested." Kilgore silently motioned me to come out and sit in a corner. I wanted to speak. I wanted to tell this man he was as drunk as I. But something inside told me this lunatic had indeed some sort of clairvoyant powers.

Kilgore's knees cracked as he stood up from his squat position. He straightened his tie, tucked his white shirt into his wrinkled baggy pants and smiled at me in my corner. He turned, bent over, and eyed the space under the bench.

"You see, the reason I got myself arrested is because I've traced the hole that got me into this dimension right to this cell. I accidentally found it when I reached under my son's bed to retrieve something I had dropped. That's back on the 4th planet. You see in my time and space this 3rd planet doesn't exist."

What could I say to that? I just sat and humored the old man by nodding my head.

"Before I leave your world, soon the arresting officer will return and search this cell for me. But of course I will not longer be present. Since there are no visible means to escape he will only search this cell, and probably will wonder if he'd lost any of his marbles. You, on the other hand, will leave this place quite convinced that I do exist. And, will someday find the opening as I did in my own dimension. What you'll experience I could tell you, but I'll leave it till the day it happens."

Kilgore took on a more serious look and crawled his long body the best he could under the bench. I must admit he looked ridiculous, but happy. Just then an officer came into the cell room and opened the cell door. He had a puzzled look on his face. I turned my attention back under the bench where Kilgore was lying. He was gone.

"All right, where's Trout?" the officer demanded.

"I guess the best place is Snow Mill pond, that's if you don't mind catching Perch every ten minutes."

The officer didn't smile, he just stood there motionless and eyed the cell from top to bottom. Still no Trout. He turned to me still sitting in my corner and motioned me out

of the cell. He brought me to the captain's office and closed the door behind him as he left. He definitely was confused.

The captain smiled nervously.

"Look, we've checked out the car, it seems the brake lines were rotted right through and the rods snapped, causing you to lose control of your car."



DORMANCY

by Holly Grant

There,
under
a dimming light,
they
decay
at the home,
as stale smoke hovers--
then disintegrates
past
a state of existence
mirrored
in the face
 of fading
 memories.
Vegetating--
with
nothing to contemplate
but
sterile walls
of artificial flowers,
owls
call
in their sleeplessness
while,
against the window panes,
forsythia bushes
lie dormant--'til Spring.

POEMS

by Sandy Wheeler

I.

WITH YOUR ARROGANT LIFE,
AND YOUR WITTY CLICHES,

WITH YOUR TWO SETS OF SILVER,
IN YOUR GOLDEN TRUNK,

WITH YOUR PRISSY TO DO HAIRCUTS,
AND YOUR SHOES SO HIGH,

WITH YOUR FANCY WEARING MAKE-UP,
ON YOUR MALDEFUNKED BODY.

WITH YOUR CONCEIT FOR BEING,
AND YOUR MEN ALL AROUND,

WITH YOUR SEQUINED PERSONALITY,
IN YOUR DEAD BRAIN.

II.

YOUR SURFACE DRENCHED WITH
WONDERING MAGGOTS,
GRINNING WITH EVERY NIBBLE.
YOU SCREAM BUT NO ONE HEARS.
AS THE MOON CONTEMPLATES
YOUR WORTH OF THE SAVING, THEY'VE
EATEN THROUGH YOUR BONES.
THE MOON SIGNALS, AND WIND
WISPS YOU QUIETLY,
INTO THE DUST...

III.

DOWN.
UPON PEBBLES OF SHARPNESS
MY TOES CURL TO CATCH ME.

DOWN.
I WAKE TO FIND MY HEAD
NOT THERE, BUT OVER YONDER.
DOWN.

IV.

AND NIGHT FELL; A DISTANT GRACE FOR LOVERS.
ROMANCE CAME, YET LEFT AT DAWN...

ONE MORE TIME WE SHINED.

AS SNOW MELTS UPON MY BREASTS, I REST ABOUT
THE GROUND, TO FIND TEARS IN PLACE OF INTRICATE LACE,
THAT GUIDES MY DRESS AROUND.

WILL YOU ANSWER INTO MY HEART, OR WILL I WALK ALONE?
IS IT CARE THAT BINDS US SO? OR IS IT FRIGHTENED LOVE?

V.

SMOKE

IT DANCES

LIKE YOU HOLDING

THE JELLY

IN MY

SOUL...

RUFUS T.

By Dennis J. Hamel

All at once, the rain, thunder, and lightning began. It seemed, at that point, that it would be useless to try fighting the heavenly holocaust just for a beer or two down at Jino's. It also seemed useless to think about it. So, Chris and I resigned ourselves to a few games of gin rummy and drinking Kool-Aid. I'll tell you, drinking Kool-Aid wasn't easy for a couple of devout alcoholics who are used to pissing every ten minutes. However, we braved the beverage change and even mentioned to each other what a challenge we had put ourselves up to. That came about, as often as it did, mainly because there was nothing else we could think about. Nothing, except beer.

Well, we had been playing gin rummy for about four restless hours when, at just about midnight, I started hearing strange noises coming from all over the house. Sounds like footsteps, and glasses clanking, and music. Being a music connoisseur of sorts, I wouldn't call the noise music. It was more like the crap they play in the jukebox down at Jino's.

"What the hell is that," is what I think I blurted out, but I really didn't have time to think about it. My brain said that we were being put upon by crooks or the C.I.A. or something. I had to think fast, so I ran to my gun cabinet and pulled out my Smith and Wesson snub nose .35 revolver with the initialed pearl handles. Well I'll tell you, there isn't any old bastard going to come into my house without my letting him in, and get away with it.

Just then I heard something behind me. I wheeled and shot, and got the sucker right between the eyes. You know, somehow, whoever it was, he looked just like Chris. I've decided, yes I'm sure, it was something like a ghost or gollywoggle, disguised as Chris. Well, the music was still echoing throughout

the house, and the footsteps and clanking glasses were still there. So I started searching the house for other ghosts or gollywoggles. First the downstairs, kitchen, livingroom, and den. Then the second floor, and then the attic. I couldn't find anything at all. But I still heard the noises. They were pounding on my head like hammers. They were coming from all directions, out of the walls, filling up the rooms. Just then I thought of the basement. Of course, the basement. And the sounds are working their way through the heating ducts; that must be it, I thought. I started running down the stairs as fast as I could. The noise was driving me bughouse. I couldn't stand it any more.

I got to the second floor landing and kept running down the stairs, but I saw the front door opening. Instead of stopping and waiting for whatever it was that was coming in, I kept going and when I hit the last step, I shot and blew its face off. Whatever it was, it had some sort of blue uniform on. I didn't really stop to find out who or what it was. I just kept going. Very quickly, I was at the cellar stairs, and instead of slowing down, I opened the door and kept on running. I figured that they knew I was coming and the only way to deal with the oncoming confrontation was quickly and surprisingly. So, just when I knew that they could see my legs on the stairs, I jumped to the floor and, where I heard a noise, I shot. My mind was racing with apprehension. Did I get them all? Soon, after the smoke had cleared, I could see them all. One was disguised as my cat. Another, as a box in the corner. The other was my furnace. That one, I had shot right in the filter. I had meant to clean that filter before, but I never got around to it. I thought that was all of them because the noise had stopped and the house was quiet. But, when I went upstairs and turned the corner to the kitchen, two of them jumped me. Both of them had blue uniforms on, like the one at the front door.

I'll tell you, I struggled hard, but one of them hit me with my own gun.

When I woke up, I was here at the home. I guess someone rescued me from the ghosts or gollywoggles. I think it was Chris, but they won't tell me who it was. Whoever it was, I'm grateful to him.

I think that the hit on the head that I got hur me bad because they won't let me go. But I don't care. Out there, in the world, are most ghosts or gollywoggles. Here, at the home, they take good care of me. And they tell me that the ghosts and gollywoggles can't get me here. There are bars on all the windows, and three locks on every door; yes sir, I'm not afraid here. No more ghosts or gollywoggles.

But I do miss Jino's.

FRANK

by Nancy Ferron

I'm sitting in this foreign country
finding it hard sometimes to get by
how hard was it for you
with screaming bombs and silenced friends

I know you loved the purple lilacs
that grew in back of Mary Beasley's house
and you liked peeling out in your '57 Chevy
especially when you and mom had a fight

I knew that more than just letters had stopped
when the priest came hesitating up the sidewalk
could you hear them when they said to ma
you'd been blown apart for damn good reasons

The president said you'd soon be promoted
and you'd get lots of nice things posthumously
I didn't know what that word meant
and I didn't know why you were getting medals for being dead

Dad stayed up all night once holding your picture
through the crack in the door I saw him rocking
he was saying "aye, aye sailor", over and over
so I just went back upstairs to bed

I wondered when I kissed that coffin
if you were trying to kiss me back
or if your lips were even in there.



HEART ATTACK

by Holly Grant

Flickering candle,
 Across your face,
 Be still.
Harvest your wheat
 In another space of time,
 Grim Reaper,
And leave us alone.

Listen to the sounds
 Of raindrops on my glasses,
 Dad. When you sigh,
The breath of yesterday's breezes
 Lifts our homemade kite
 High over the open field.

Lit by the sunset,
 Puffs of strawberry ice cream
Float on the Autumn sky.
 Then melt into eternity.

Now, your hospital room
 Is our garden,
Where gladiolas grow
 Out of milk glass vases.

I sit by your side
 During our night together
While ribbons of unfolded candy,
 Taken for granted,
Stream past the years of silence.

As your shoulders heave slightly,
 I weave you into my arms,
Dearest Father,
 My parent, my child.
And, rocking, rocking--
 We wait for the morning.

THE FLOWER

by William G. Wolfe

The scent is sweet,
The fragrance soft,
The petals colored and pure,

The dewdrops glisten
like tears of joy
that soon dry.

The beauty of the flower
is crystal clear,
but the seasons still change
every year.

The scent expires,
The petals shrivel and fall.

But fear not, my friend,
Soon another flower will bloom
to take the droplets of dew
and change them to the sweet fragrances
for the senses that the
other flower knew.

